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**United States Foreign Policy Toward East Timor: Past, Present, and Future and the Grassroots Response**

-- Matthew Jardine, ETAN/U.S.

United States foreign policy toward Indonesia is of fundamental importance for the self-determination of the people of East Timor. Since the Indonesian invasion of 7 December 1975, the United States has provided Jakarta with more than US\$2 billion in economic and military<sup>1</sup> aid and with considerable diplomatic assistance<sup>2</sup>. U.S. acquiescence toward and cooperation with the Suharto government has been a decisive factor in making possible Indonesia's invasion, annexation, and ongoing occupation of East Timor.

Recent developments in the United States, however, provide us with reason to hope for substantial change in U.S. Government policy toward Indonesia. Since the November 1991 Santa Cruz Massacre public awareness of and political activity around East Timor has grown significantly. The East Timor Action Network/U.S. has grown in less than two years to an organization with more than 10 chapters in different geographic areas of the country. Major establishment newspapers like the New York Times and the Washington Post <sup>HAVE</sup> editorialized in favor of East Timorese self-determination, the Post going so far to call Indonesia "a leading Asian colonialist" (5 December 1992).

In terms of U.S. government policy, many see the passing of the Cold War as an opportunity to bring an end to U.S. complicity to the Indonesian genocide and occupation. Clinton and his vice-president, Albert Gore, have both made strong statements against past U.S. policy on East Timor. The passing of a resolution condemning Indonesian human rights violations in East Timor, co-sponsored by the United States, at the recent (March 1993) meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva is regarded by some as a sign that the Clinton Administration will be markedly different from its predecessors. The vote comes in the aftermath of the September 1992 U.S. congressional cut-off of International Military Education and



Training funds (US\$2.3 million for FY 1992-93) -- the first time since the invasion that the U.S. Government has reduced aid to Indonesia over the issue of East Timor. A recent attempt by the Jordanian government to sell 4 U.S.-made F-5E fighter jets to Jakarta -- a sale that the U.S. government must approve -- has been delayed (and quite possibly blocked) by Congressional and grassroots opposition. A few weeks ago, the U.S. Trade Representative announced that Indonesia risks suspension of its tariff privileges received under the General System of Preferences (GSP). Jakarta has until February to clean up its labor and human rights record or it will lose GSP benefits that amounted to US\$562 million in savings for Indonesia in 1990. While the issues around the possible GSP suspension are much larger than East Timor, Congressional anger over East Timor reportedly played an important role in the Clinton Administration's decision.

These developments, which we should certainly welcome, indicate to some that Indonesia is no longer so important to the United States in a post-Cold War world. However, we need to put these seeming changes in an historical perspective lest we lose sight of the profundity of the task at hand. Despite the establishment rhetoric of the Cold War which presented conflicts in Asia and throughout the world simply in East-West or geopolitical terms, U.S. foreign policy has long been more substantially driven by political economic concerns -- this is no less than case in terms of Indonesia and East Timor. Cold War rhetoric and ideology have helped to mask many of the more important reasons for U.S. action. A recognition of this fact should give us pause from being overly optimistic about the prospects for radical change in U. S. policy on East Timor in the near future. An analysis of U.S. policy toward East Timor is valuable not only in and of itself but also for what it teaches us about U.S. foreign policy in general as well as for how it exposes the perhaps fatal flaws of our international legal and human rights regime.

I divide this brief paper into three parts. In the first



part, I deal with the historical roots of and motives behind U.S. policy on the question of Indonesia and, subsequently, East Timor. After that, I am going to provide a quick overview and analysis of U.S. policy on East Timor since the Indonesian invasion. Finally, I offer an analysis of East Timor policy during the Clinton era, grassroots activity on East Timor, and possible directions for the future.

In the post-World War II era, Indonesia has been a major player in U.S. geopolitical and imperial strategy in Southeast Asia. Even before the Dutch withdrawal from Indonesia at the time of independence, the United States had a position of considerable power within the Indonesian political economy, albeit a subordinate one. Already by 1939, the Dutch East Indies was supplying over half of the U.S.'s total of "no less than fifteen distinct commodities" (Marshall 1973, p. 7). By 1928, U.S. oil interests became the dominant force in the Dutch East Indies petroleum industry. Direct U.S. investment in that sector grew from US\$15 million in 1924 to US\$85 million in 1939 out of a total U.S. capital interest in Indonesia of about US\$200 million in 1940 (Southwood and Flanagan 1983, p. 23).

World War II and the independence of former European colonies throughout Asia presented U.S. elites with both challenges and opportunities. Europe's departure from Asia created a power vacuum in which Western access to the region's resources was no longer a guarantee. The very same vacuum, however, meant that the capacity of European capital to limit U.S. economic penetration of the region would decline. With decolonization in Asia, the economic situation changed rapidly as previously relatively marginalized economic interests, especially the U.S. and Japan, penetrated the region. "U.S. investment accelerated coincident with the Indochina War in the sixties to overtake Britain's investment lead, the legacy of her pre-war dominance in plantation and mining investments in her former colonies . . ." (Selden 1975, pp. 23-24).<sup>3</sup>

In the early years of World War II, prominent policy



makers within the U.S. Government were busily crafting U.S. strategy in the region. Of primary concern was U.S. access to and control of the region's great mineral wealth. Stanley K. Hornbeck, the Political Advisor for Far Eastern Affairs in the Department of State, articulated such concerns.

Only on the lands west of the Pacific, and especially on southeastern Asia is our dependence so vital and complete that our very existence as a great industrial power, and perhaps even as an independent state, is threatened if the sources [of raw materials] should be cut off (Marshall 1974, p. 9.).

Hornbeck's major concern was Japan whose presence in Southeast Asia, he felt, would threaten British and U.S. control of the region's strategic natural resources as well as trading routes connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans (Ibid.).<sup>4</sup>

Quickly stepping into the power vacuum created by the vanquished powers of Europe and Japan, the U.S. was eager to take advantage of the region's incredible resources and commercial opportunities as some in the U.S. Congress were quick to articulate.

Trade with China and other parts of the Orient, Australia, New Zealand, the Dutch East Indies, and with many islands of the Pacific will unquestionably develop and expand during the postwar era. These areas not only offer many markets for American products but are substantial producers of raw materials useful to our economy. . . . Our merchant marine and commercial firms should be given the opportunity to take over a large portion of that trade formerly handled by the Japanese and their vessels (Hayes et al., pp. 20-21<sup>5</sup>).

In the post-World War II global political economy, the United States clearly emerged as the world political-economy's most powerful player -- economically, politically, and militarily -- and thus was in a superior position to dictate the global agenda, a situation that did not escape prominent U.S. policy makers.

In a famous (formerly) top secret foreign policy document



from 1948, George Kennan, Director of the Policy Planning Staff at the U.S. State Department, laid out what is regarded by many as the basis for Truman's "containment policy" and generally for post-World War II U.S. foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> Noting the huge disparity in terms of wealth between the United States and the peoples of Asia, Kennan advises:

. . . Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security.

. . . We should cease to talk about vague and . . . unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. . .

We should recognize that our influence in the Far Eastern area in the coming period is going to be primarily military and economic. We should make a careful study to see what parts of the Pacific and Far Eastern world are absolutely vital to our security, and we should concentrate our policy on seeing to it that those areas remain in hands which we can control or rely on (Kennan 1948, pp. 524-5).

Clearly, Kennan was advocating some sort of neo-colonial system for Asia, a geopolitical and political-economic geographic order, for a global "Pax Americana". As Peter Taylor argues, Kennan's geopolitical code<sup>7</sup> was a reaction to the World War II era idealism in the U.S. foreign policy arena. Rather than trying to achieve a "one world" strategy under which all nation-states would achieve some sort of modus vivendi under universal values (as dictated by the U.S.), containment was the order of the day. U.S. interests, broadly construed, would be best served by identifying areas of vital importance and doing the utmost to bring or to keep these areas in the U.S. sphere of influence (Taylor 1989, pp. 82-83). Kennan's assumptions and worldview have continued to inform U.S. foreign policy in the "Far East" and throughout the world up until the present time. Applied to the issue of East Timorese self-determination, Kennan's analysis



provides us with a further understanding of U.S. and Western efforts to maintain and mold the political-economic geography of South and Southeast Asia.

Of course there has been a great deal of resistance to the US project. These struggles have been both geopolitical and anti-imperialist<sup>8</sup> in nature. Geopolitically, the Soviet Union was, until recently, the principle adversary. Politically-economically, the resistance has tended to take the form of non-aligned nationalism (i.e. Sukarno) and/or indigenous left-oriented movements such as in the French colonies of Indochina and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). From the perspective of U.S. foreign policy elites, all such challenges, depending on the time and place, needed to be contained or eliminated.

U.S. intervention in the former French Indochina was the apogee of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia and, as such, represents the best example of the motives behind and objectives of U.S. foreign policy in the region. As U.S. News & World Report informed its readers in 1954, the principal reason for the U.S.'s going to war in Indochina, according to the Eisenhower administration, was for the control of the region's natural resources.

One of the world's richest areas is open to the winner in Indo-China. That's behind the growing U.S. concern.

Communists are fighting for the wealth of the Indies. Tin, rubber, rice, key strategic raw materials are what the war is really about. U.S. sees it as a place to hold -- at any price ("Why U.S. Risks War for Indo-China", p. 21).<sup>9</sup>

Although the reasons for U.S. involvement in Indochina are certainly numerous and complex, the "need" for U.S. capital to have unimpeded access to raw materials in Southeast Asia surely had a decisive impact on the U.S. decision to intervene.<sup>10</sup> In terms of the overall strategy of maintaining Southeast Asia within the U.S. (and West's) sphere of influence, Indonesia was perceived by many to be the centerpiece of that political



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economic geographic order.<sup>11</sup> However, it was the "need" for overall regional stability (i.e. an environment open to Western capital penetration) rather than Indonesia that served as the basis for U.S. foreign policy in the region. Operating under the assumption that the world's resources belonged to the West, the U.S. foreign policy apparatus conducted one of the most violent military campaigns in world history in the war against Vietnam and, later against Cambodia and Laos.

Similarly, the rise of the Indonesian Communist Party and President Sukarno's version of non-aligned nationalism was seen as a threat by U.S. elites -- a threat that had to be eliminated. The 1965 destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party and the subsequent semi-coup d'état that pushed Sukarno out of office in favor of Suharto delighted many in the United States<sup>12</sup> and throughout the West who regarded Sukarno as problematic. Richard Nixon serves as an excellent example of Western elite opinion in the aftermath of what Benedict Anderson and Ruth McVey call "one of the great slaughters of our time" (B. Anderson and McVey 1978, p. 42). In a 1967 article, Nixon defended U.S. involvement in Vietnam, without which "Asia would be a far different place today." Nixon went on to explain the importance of U.S. involvement in the region in assisting the 1965-67 slaughter in Indonesia and protecting U.S. imperial interests.

The U.S. presence has provided tangible and highly visible proof that communism is not necessarily the wave of Asia's future. This was a vital factor in the turnaround in Indonesia where a tendency toward fatalism is a national characteristic. It provided a shield behind which the anti-communist forces found the courage and the capacity to stage their counter-coup and, at the final moment, to rescue their country from the Chinese orbit. And, with its 100 million people, and its 3,000-mile arc of islands containing the region's richest hoard of natural resources, Indonesia constitutes by far the greatest prize in the Southeast Asia area (Nixon 1967, p. 111).<sup>13</sup>

U.S. involvement in the massacre was apparently quite



significant. According to a May 1990 States News Service report by Kathy Kadane, the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta supplied the Indonesian military with the names of thousands of PKI leaders who were subsequently killed by the military (Chomsky 1990, p. 15).<sup>14</sup> U.S. elites saw Indonesia as playing an important role in maintaining the stability of the region. The destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party and the coming to power of the Suharto regime undoubtedly put Indonesia firmly back into the camp of the West.<sup>15</sup>

Suharto's coming to power facilitated increased Western capital penetration of Indonesia. By the 1970's, Indonesia surpassed the Philippines as the locus of primary U.S. investment in Southeast Asia -- largely because of increased investment in Indonesia's petroleum industry (Selden 1975, p. 24).<sup>16</sup> The great profits available to international capital in Indonesia and throughout the Pacific region<sup>17</sup> necessitated smooth relations between Washington and Jakarta. Given the geopolitical and political economic benefits derived from a pro-West Indonesian state, the U.S. foreign policy establishment perceived a clear need to please Indonesia<sup>18</sup> --even at the cost of the people of East Timor.

It was known for a while that the Indonesians were intending to invade. It was at this point where the West surely could have had an impact. However, as an August 1975 diplomatic cable from the Australian Ambassador in Jakarta, Richard Woolcott, to the Department of Foreign Affairs in Canberra clearly illustrates, this was not the desire of Western elites.

The United States might have some influence on Indonesia at present as Indonesia really wants and needs US assistance in its military re-equipment program. The State Department has, we understand, instructed the embassy to cut down its reporting on Timor. But [US] Ambassador Newsom told me last night that he is under instructions from Kissinger personally not to involve himself in discussions on Timor with the Indonesians on the ground that the US is involved



in enough problems of greater importance overseas at present. I will be seeing Newsom on Monday, but his present attitude is that the US should keep out of the Portuguese Timor situation and allow events to take their course (Melbourne Sun, 1 May 1976 quoted in Kohen and Taylor, 1979, pp. 34-35).

Former officials of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) have made it clear that the U.S. Government, at best, did nothing to prevent the Indonesian invasion despite the U.S. ability to do so as an unnamed CIA officer "intimately familiar" with the East Timor situation at the time of the Indonesian invasion argued.

We had lots of time to move the Indonesians in a different direction. Instead, we got right on the Indonesian bandwagon. . . . It [East Timor] would have been a viable entity if we and some other governments made clear to the Indonesians there would be a price to pay if they went ahead and invaded (Southerland 1980, p. 6).<sup>19</sup>

It is commonly acknowledged that the Ford Administration actually gave Suharto the green light to invade East Timor. President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger were in Jakarta the day before Indonesia launched the invasion. In regard to East Timor, Kissinger told the media in Jakarta that "the United States understands Indonesia's position on the question" (Associated Press, 7 December 1975). According to columnist Jack Anderson, Suharto was eager to obtain U.S. support for the invasion because of ABRI's heavy reliance on U.S. weaponry which, by U.S. law, could only be used for defensive purposes. Apparently, Ford satisfied Jakarta's wishes.

That Suharto succeeded is confirmed by Ford himself. The United States had suffered a devastating setback in Vietnam, leaving Indonesia as the most important American ally in the area. The U.S. national interest, Ford concluded, "had to be on the side of Indonesia" (Jack Anderson, 9 November 1979).

As defined by national elites, the "national interest" often



serves as a substitute phrase for the interests of U.S. based-capital. That the importance of Indonesia to U.S. geopolitical and political economic interests helped to influence U.S. policy on East Timor is undeniable. In January 1976, a U.S. State Department official explained "(i)n terms of the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Indonesia, we are more or less condoning the incursion into East Timor."

The United States wants to keep its relations with Indonesia close and friendly. We regard Indonesia as a friendly, non-aligned nation -- a nation we do a lot of business with ("Aid to Indonesia Doubled as U.S. Shrugs off Timor", The Australian, 22 January 1976, reprinted in Retboll 1980, pp. 85-86).

This policy of "realpolitik" was not something limited to Republican administrations such as those of Ford or Reagan. Even President Jimmy Carter, thought of by many as a human rights advocate (and with whom many liberal commentators favorably compare with Clinton), pursued an East Timor policy that greatly facilitated the increasing Indonesian subjugation of the former Portuguese colony that took place during his administration (1977-1980).<sup>20</sup> Military aid to Jakarta, for example, increased significantly during the Carter Administration (1977-1980) (see endnote 1).

For some time the location of East Timor has been of strategic importance to the U.S. military. In a 1977 paper on the military importance of certain straits within the Indonesian archipelago, R.G. Boyd of the Canadian Defense Department, called the Ombai-Wetar straits off of East Timor's north coast (and the Lombok strait) essential to U.S. strategy. Along with the Strait of Gibraltar, he rated them "as the most crucial deep-water straits in the world in American defence [sic] planning" (Jolliffe 1984). Jill Jolliffe argues that this "is one of the reasons that the US and its regional ally Australia refused from the outset to contemplate self-determination for East Timor" (Ibid.).



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In a August 2, 1976 report from Singapore in The Age of Melbourne, anonymous "US officials stationed in South-East Asia" were cited as sources reporting that Australian Prime Minister Fraser had been warned by high-ranking members of the Ford Administration to back down from the former's criticisms of Indonesia's takeover of East Timor.

The officials . . . disclosed that control of East Timor by a "friendly anti-communist" government was a matter of direct strategic interest to the US.

This is because the fastest and safest way for American nuclear-armed submarines to pass submerged between the Pacific and Indian Oceans is through the little-known deep water Straits of Ombai-Wetar north of Timor islands.

. . . .  
The US considers that Indonesian Government good will is important for securing American and allied interests in a global context as well as in South-East Asia (Richardson 1976).

As an independent East Timor might have threatened the stability of the U.S. geopolitical and political-economic interests in Southeast Asia, the Indonesian occupation of East Timor was ignored and abetted by the U.S. Government. Through massive amounts of military, economic and diplomatic assistance, the U.S. government has maintained the favor of the Indonesian government and thus ensured U.S. corporate interests in the region. That East Timor has suffered in the process is the inevitable by-product.

In 1993, the world is certainly very different, in many ways, from that of 1975. The Cold War is over but what that means in terms of U.S.-Indonesian relations is not altogether clear. As I have tried to show, the foundation of U.S.-Indonesia relations has long been based on material interests. That the Soviet Union might have threatened U.S. interests in Southeast Asia was certainly an irritant, but not the primary reason underlying U.S.-Indonesia relations. Of far greater concern has been U.S.



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and international capital's access to the resources and low-wage labor of the region. In this sense, the world has not changed greatly in the 17 years since the Indonesian invasion of East Timor.

Despite the recent positive development in the U.S. toward Indonesia and East Timor, there are other signs which suggest that these developments are not so significant and that U.S. policy on the question of East Timorese self-determination will not change greatly in the near future. In June's meeting of the Consultative Group (CGI) on Indonesia, the United States pledged US\$90 million for FY 1993-94 (US\$3 million less than the previous year). Most recently, the Pentagon requested that the Indonesian government be allowed to purchase U.S. military training.

In addition, last year's IMET cut-off needs to be placed in perspective. While it is true that the elimination of IMET training occurred in spite of strong opposition from the U.S. Departments of State and Defense and from major U.S. corporations such as A.T.&T., IMET represents only a small fraction of U.S. military assistance to Jakarta. Prior to the IMET U.S., U.S. journalist Allan Nairn spoke to a Pentagon official who predicted that Congress would cut-off IMET funds to Indonesia.

He [the official] said that this would be a way of making a public statement while at the same time avoiding unduly upsetting the Indonesians. He said that if the IMET aid were cut, Indonesia would understand. It would continue to take US weapons deliveries. And, likewise, he said that US arms contractors would have no reason to complain (Nairn 1992, p. 9).

In many ways, this is what seems to have come to be. The most recent Congressional Presentation Document estimates that in 1993 US\$11 million worth of U.S. weaponry was sold to Jakarta through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program -- a government to government transaction; another US\$32 million was sold through commercial arms sales -- all of which have to be approved by the U.S. government. For 1994, Congress estimates that there will be



US\$15 million in U.S. arms sales through FMS and another US\$16 million in commercial sales. As these figures are estimates at this point, the true figures will probably turn out to be significantly higher.

At the same time U.S. capital has not lost its enthusiasm for Indonesia and thus we can expect U.S. businesses to fight hard against any attempts to reduce aid (largely hidden subsidies to U.S. corporations) to Indonesia. Coca-Cola President Donald Keough recently gushed about Indonesia's market potential:

When I think of Indonesia -- a country on the equator with 180 million people, a median age of eighteen, and a Muslim ban on alcohol -- I feel like I know what heaven looks like (quoted in Dollars & Sense, May 1992)

Such enthusiasm is not limited to Coca-Cola but extends to a variety of U.S. multinationals doing business in Indonesia and in Indonesian-occupied East Timor where U.S. oil companies such as Marathon Oil are joining in the pillage and plunder of the Timor Gap.

However, the potential oil and natural gas wealth of East Timor is probably not that significant in determining U.S. corporate and government policy on East Timor. The overall concern is Indonesia proper where U.S. business simply wants a stable environment to seek profits. In the words of American Indonesian Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Wayne Forrest (whose group fought against the IMET cut), the United States is in an economic "global dogfight" in which "Indonesia is a battleground" (Jardine, December 1992, p. 20-21). If the U.S. were to take action against Indonesia, the U.S. would be acting as a "lone wolf" and would only end up isolating itself and thus hurting U.S. capital interests involved with Indonesia.<sup>21</sup>

Despite this negative assessment, there are many reasons for cautious hope -- many of which I outlined at the beginning. There certainly is a great deal more public and elite awareness on and sympathy for East Timor. Grassroots political activity, basically invisible prior to the Santa Cruz Massacre, is now very



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evident. This has been, in a brief time, a significant change in the attention and concern toward and in the discourse on an issue that was largely unknown less than two years ago. These factors provide us with a greatly-enlarged space for struggle over U.S. policy on East Timor.

There are important differences between the Clinton Administration and its Republican predecessors, but there are a greater number of similarities which are both ideologically and, more importantly, institutionally based. We need to be aware of this when assessing the prospects of change in U.S. policy. Clinton's recent bombings of Iraq were a quick cold shower for those in the U.S. who hoped that things might be significantly different in the new administration.

The passing of the Cold War means that one of the major *raison d'etres* of an anti-East Timor policy no longer exists. To those who share the outlook of the Cold War as a fight between good and evil, a fight over ideals rather than material interests, the decline in world communism could possibly mean a greater level of sympathy for the East Timorese cause. On the other hand, as I have tried to argue in this <sup>PAPER</sup> ~~thesis~~, the West's blocking of East Timorese self-determination has had far more to do with material interests than with ideals. In this sense, the passing of the Cold War is not very meaningful for East Timor.

Perhaps what has changed, however, is the assessment of what Indonesia and an independent East Timor mean to Western geopolitical and imperial interests. In terms of national integration, Indonesia is a ~~seems significantly~~ more stable country today than it was in 1975. In addition, Western domination of the world economy is far more sophisticated than it once was. Rather than direct colonization, structural domination exists (through GATT, international financial institutions and the very nature of a world economy predicated on inequality). Because of these factors, it is possible that the U.S. foreign policy elites, in addition to being influenced by humanitarian concerns, could make an assessment that an independent East Timor will not be a threat to Indonesian national stability and U.S.



capital penetration of the region. The big question, however, is whether the Congress and the Clinton Administration are willing to take the strong steps necessary to force Indonesia to respect East Timor's right of self-determination. This will require not only a cut-off of U.S. economic and military assistance to Jakarta but also U.S. lobbying in the United Nations and of its Western allies to also take strong steps against Jakarta.

In terms of the East Timor Action Network/U.S., apart from what goes on in East Timor and Indonesia themselves, we see the U.S. as the key player in East Timor's future. Such an assessment is simply a recognition of the fact that the U.S. is the world's most powerful country. As shown in Geneva in March, U.S. policy on East Timor can and will have a significant effect on the policies of other powerful Western countries. This fact makes our work in the U.S. all the more necessary. In the short term, we will continue our demonstrations, media and Congressional outreach, our educational activities, and the strengthening of our ties with other solidarity and human rights groups working on East Timor. Most recently, a speaking tour of East Timorese and the Noam Chomsky film Manufacturing Consent served as major boosts in increasing public awareness on East Timor and ETAN "membership" and chapters. Longer term goals include public campaigns against U.S. corporations doing business in East Timor and Indonesia.

Tragedies such as East Timor are common features of U.S. foreign policy throughout the world. With few exceptions, the policy of the U.S. has been to work against human rights, self-determination, and basic justice whether in Angola, El Salvador or East Timor. In this sense, the work of ETAN/U.S. is much more long-term. By working for greater levels of democracy and social justice at home, we help alleviate those suffering at the hands of U.S. government-fuelled repression.

East Timor has been sacrificed as part of the U.S.'s and the West's efforts to maintain their positions of wealth and



privilege. This is not a conspiracy but simply how our world seems to work. Globally, there are numerous East Timor-like situations. Throughout the world, the denial of self-determination and gross human rights (political, social and economic) abuses abound. Clearly, the inter-nation-state system is not capable of protecting the fundamental human rights of large segments of the world's population. The intersection of a global political-economy predicated on gross inequality with militarism, nationalism and patriarchy provides a context that make the East Timors of the world almost inevitable. To the extent that a world of gross inequalities and human rights abuses are a function of unequal distribution of resources, a radical restructuring of the political and economic organization of our world in order to create a global society of greater justice must be our ultimate goal.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The most direct way in which the U.S. has assisted Indonesia's invasion and occupation of East Timor has been militarily. According to the U.S. State Department, U.S. companies (all sales approved by the U.S. Government) supplied some 90 percent of the weapons used by the Indonesians during the invasion (Chomsky 1979, p. 2). Since that time, Indonesia's supply of arms has become far more diverse, receiving arms from a diverse group of (largely) Western countries.

In the case of the United States, military aid doubled (during the Ford administration) in the year after the invasion despite an official claim of an arms sale suspension. Military aid continued to increase during both the Carter and Reagan Administrations.

Justifying military aid on the grounds of *de facto* recognition at a very early stage (1976), the United States increased its arms supplies to Indonesia dramatically after the invasion, with peaks coinciding with the offensives in 1978-9 and 1981-2. In the period 1982-4, military sales exceeded US\$1,000 million, including weaponry particularly useful for the 1983-4 offensive (Taylor 1991, p. 169).

Since the 1975 invasion, over 2,600 Indonesian military officers have received military training in the United States under the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program (Scheiner 1992, p. 51).

That U.S. assistance to Indonesia was illegal, in light of the latter's use of weaponry for offensive purposes, was inconsequential to elite policy makers within the U.S. government.

In a State Department meeting of 18 December 1975, Secretary of State Kissinger berated his colleagues for sending him a cable stating that Indonesia had violated the law. In defending Indonesia Kissinger asked, "The Israelis when they go into Lebanon -- when was the last time that we protested that?" In response to an answer that such Israeli actions constitute self-defense, Kissinger replied, "And we can't construe a Communist government in the middle of Indonesia as self-defense?" After affirming that he knew what the law was and asking "but how can it be in the US national interest for us to . . . kick the Indonesians in the teeth?", Kissinger lectured the gathered on the need to sacrifice principles for the national interest.

You have an obligation to the national interest. I don't care if we sell equipment to Indonesia or not. I get nothing from it. I get no rakeoff. But you have an obligation to figure out how to serve your country. The Foreign Service is not to serve itself. The Service stands for service to the United States and not service to the Foreign Service (quoted in Hertsgaard 1990, pp. 492-493).

Thus, East Timor was sacrificed to the Indonesian government because the former was less in the "national interest" than the latter.



<sup>2</sup>Daniel Patrick Moynihan, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations during the Ford administration, took great pride in his ability to prevent effective U.N. action on the issue of East Timor. In talking about East Timor and the Western Sahara in his memoirs, Moynihan boasted of his skill as a diplomat in diverting the U.N. from one of the great human rights tragedies of the late twentieth century.

China altogether backed **Fretilin** in Timor, and lost. In Spanish Sahara, Russia just as completely backed Algeria, and its front, known as **Polisario**, and lost. In both instances the United States wished things to turn out as they did, and worked to bring this about. The Department of State desired that the United Nations prove utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook. This task was given to me, and I carried it forward with no inconsiderable success (Moynihan 1978, p. 247).

Four days after the Indonesian invasion, the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution deploring the invasion, calling upon Indonesia to withdraw immediately, and upholding the right to self-determination of the East Timorese. The vote was seventy-two to ten, with 43 abstentions, including the U.S., Canada and most Western European countries (Taylor and Kohen 1979, p. 38). Since that time, most Western countries have either abstained from the voting (France, Germany, the United Kingdom) or voted "no" on most of the resolutions (Japan, the United States, Australia) that attempted to condemn Indonesia's occupation of East Timor or even those whose purpose was to instruct the Secretary-General to investigate the situation (Barbedo de Magalhaes, pp. 263-268). In this way the West has effectively blocked any United Nations action on the issue. Since 1982, in fact, the East Timorese nationalist movement and its allies have not tried to bring a vote on the issue to the General Assembly or to the Security Council for fear that the vote will either go in Indonesia's favor or be so embarrassingly close as to be a de facto victory for Jakarta. Nevertheless, the issue of East Timor is kept alive in the United Nations through the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and the Decolonization Committee.

<sup>3</sup>"As illustrated by U.S. colonial interests in the Pacific, the United States has long recognized the strategic and economic importance of the Pacific area. World War II drastically altered the power relations within the region. In the aftermath of the War, with Japan destroyed and Europe's colonial empire in shambles, the United States emerged as the dominant power -- a position for which the U.S. had been striving since the nineteenth century. The gradual establishment of U.S. hegemony in the Pacific led to what some observers have referred to as an *American Lake*" (Hayes et al. 1986, p. 16).

<sup>4</sup>In a "famous and extremely influential memorandum" of 1940, "The Importance of Singapore to the Defense of the British Isles and the



British Empire and to the Interests of the United States", Hornbeck said the following:

The importance of Singapore to the immediate defense of the British Isles lies in its command of the means of access to the raw materials and man power of Malaya, the Dutch East Indies and India. While the British Isles could doubtless do without direct access to these materials and to this man power, the effect of such a loss upon the economic and financial resources of the British Empire -- a vital factor in the defense of the British Isles -- would be considerable. Such a loss by seriously weakening our own economy (rubber, tin, jute, quinine, vegetable oils, tungsten, antimony, mica are among the supplies that might be lost to us) would adversely affect the extent of our economic aid to the British Isles (Marshall 1974, p. 9).

The citations for the two Hornbeck quotes in Marshall read as follows (in reverse order of appearance in this paper): "Hornbeck Mss., Box 461, December 1940 file; Hoover Library, Stanford;" and "*Ibid.* June file."

<sup>5</sup>From U.S. Congress, Committee of Naval Affairs and Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, "No. 67: Survey of Pacific Areas", Report to Chairman, 29 May 1946, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Because of the influence such a document held in terms of informing U.S. foreign policy, it is quoted at length:

Our political philosophy and our patterns for living have very little applicability to masses of people in Asia. They may be all right for us, with our highly developed political traditions running back into the centuries and with our peculiarly favorable geographic position . . .

Furthermore, we have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. This disparity is particularly great as between ourselves and the peoples of Asia. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so, we will have to dispense with all our sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. . . .

. . . All of the Asiatic peoples are faced with the necessity for evolving new forms of life to conform to the impact of modern technology. This process of adaptation will be long and violent. It is not only possible, but probable, that in the course of this process many peoples will fall, for varying periods under the influence of Moscow, whose ideology has a greater lure for such peoples, and probably greater reality, than anything we could oppose to it. . . .

In the face of this situation we would be better off to dispense now with a number of the concepts which have underlined



our thinking with the regard to the Far East. We should dispense with the aspiration to "be liked" or to be regarded as the repository of a high-minded international altruism. We should stop putting ourselves in the position of being our brothers' keeper and refrain from offering moral and ideological advice. We should cease to talk about vague and -- for the Far East -- unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.

We should recognize that our influence in the Far Eastern area in the coming period is going to be primarily military and economic. We should make a careful study to see what parts of the Pacific and Far Eastern world are absolutely vital to our security, and we should concentrate our policy on seeing to it that those areas remain in hands which we can control or rely on (Kennan 1948, pp. 524-5).

<sup>7</sup>Peter Taylor speaks of geopolitical codes which are "the set of strategic assumptions a government makes about other states in forming its foreign policy." These codes operate on three geographic levels -- local, regional and global.

The local level code involves evaluation of neighbouring states. . . . Regional level codes are required for states who aspire to project their power beyond their immediate neighbours. . . . (A) few states will have global policies and . . . world-wide geopolitical codes (Taylor 1989, p. 20).

<sup>8</sup>Peter Taylor defines geopolitics as concerning "rivalry . . . in the core for domination of the periphery" (Taylor 1989, p. 45). Such a definition is a bit limiting. As Saul Cohen argues, we need to also look at regional powers, "second-order powers," which are critical in helping to construct geopolitical regional frameworks (Cohen 1982, p. 231).

The problem with much of geopolitical discourse is that it ignores the issues of power and domination. Peter Taylor directly links the practice of geopolitics to the goals of imperialism. Imperialism for Taylor is about relations of domination of the core over the periphery. In terms of this paper, imperialism, "a dominance relation in the world-economy . . . not found prior to the sixteenth century" (Ibid, p. 97), is treated only in the modern sense of the word and applied within a world systems mode of analysis. This dominance relation is primarily an economic one in which both the need for markets -- constructed by the imperial power by creating new "needs" on the part of the colonized population -- and cheap labor are paramount (Ibid, p. 100). Similar to his definition of geopolitics, we need to enlarge Taylor's definition to include imperialism by non-Western countries (such as Indonesia's annexation of East Timor).



2

In terms of the West, "neo-colonialism" or "informal imperialism" has replaced the more overt forms of political economic control. This is not to say that attempts to exercise overt control (e.g., the U.S. war against Nicaragua) still do not exist, but rather, given that the world system as a whole is based on inequality, core states have structural\* advantages over those in the periphery. It is through structures of inequality such as international and political-economic institutions that the core is able to continue to produce and reproduce gross socio-economic inequalities over space.

Although an analytical distinction is made between geopolitics and imperialism, in practice the two are often inextricably linked.

Current usage distinguishes geopolitics as concerned with rivalry between major powers (core and rising semi-periphery states), and imperialism as domination by strong states (in the core) of weak states (in the periphery). . . . The interesting question for political geography is the relation between the two concepts in their politics and in their spatial structure (Taylor 1989, p. 45).

In the case of the most powerful players in the world political economy, rivalries (i.e., geopolitics) between nation-states certainly exist, but these rivalries are usually ones to gain superiority or domination (i.e., imperialism) over a particular geographical area. It is for this reason that, despite making an analytical distinction, I often treat the practices of geopolitics and imperialism in a simultaneous and interconnected manner.

\*"By 'structural' we mean that the advantage is built into the whole operation of the world-economy. This is more than a mere cumulative advantage -- the system relies on this inequality as part of its functioning. . . . Wallerstein (1979) uses Tawney's tadpole philosophy to illustrate this. Although a few tadpoles will survive to become adult frogs most will perish not because of their individual failings but because they are part of an ecology which limits the total number of frogs. . . . To have a core you need a periphery and without both there would be no world-economy. In this situation it is easier to maintain a core position than to rise upwards" (Taylor 1989, p. 123).

<sup>9</sup>This is U.S. News & World Report's summary of the answer provided by President Eisenhower at a White House Press Conference on 7 April 1954. Eisenhower was asked to comment "on the strategic importance of Indo-China to the free world."

<sup>10</sup>In further defending U.S. intervention in Indochina, President Eisenhower spoke of the geopolitical and political economic importance of Asia as a whole (as paraphrased by U.S. World & News Report).

First of all, he said, there is the specific value of a locality in its production of materials that the world needs.

. . . (T)here is the possibility that many human beings could



pass under a dictatorship that is inimical to the free world; and, finally, there are broader considerations that might follow the "falling domino" principle.

. . . .  
The third possibility . . . is that the loss of Indo-China would set off the loss of Burma, of Thailand, of the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia. This would not only multiply the disadvantages the U.S. would suffer through loss of materials, or sources of materials, but it would involve millions and millions and millions of people, and would create a new geographical position, he said (Ibid.).

According to U.S. News & World Report, U.S. intervention in Vietnam was "officially regarded as a war for the control of Asia."

This sentiment was echoed eleven years later by the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam. In justifying U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge explained the geopolitical and political economic importance the region to the United States.

Geographically, Vietnam stands at the hub of a vast area of the world -- Southeast Asia -- an area with a population of 240 million people extending 2,300 miles from north to south, and 3,000 miles from east to west. The Mekong River, one of the ten largest rivers in the world, reaches the sea in South Vietnam. He who holds or has influence in Vietnam can affect the future of the Philippines and Taiwan to the east, Taiwan and Burma with their huge rice surpluses to the west, and Malaysia and Indonesia with their rubber, oil and tin to the south. Japan, Australia and New Zealand would in turn be deeply concerned with the Communization of South Vietnam (Lodge 1965, p. 15).

<sup>11</sup>Eisenhower articulated this sentiment in a news conference.

Indonesia, whose westernmost island lies across a narrow strait from Malaya, is the richest prize in all Southeast Asia. It has about 80 million people and a land area about a fourth as large as that of the U.S.

That land can yield bountiful harvests of rubber, tea, rice, and many other crops . . . Underlying the land are big deposits of tin, oil and coal, along with many other minerals ("Why U.S. Risks War for Indo-China", p. 23).

This was made even more clear by President Eisenhower in a 4 August 1953 speech to the U.S. Governors' Conference concerning the rich empire of Indonesia":

Now let us assume that we lose Indochina. If Indochina goes, several things happen right away. The Malay peninsula, the last little bit of land hanging on down there, would be scarcely defensible. The tin and tungsten we so greatly value from that area would cease coming, but all India would be outflanked.

Burma would be in no position for defense . . . All of that position around there is very ominous to the United States,



because finally if we lost all that, how would the free world hold the rich empire of Indonesia?

So you see, somewhere along the line, this must be blocked and it must be blocked now, and that is what we are trying to do.

So when the U.S. votes \$400 million to help that war [in Indochina], we are not voting a give-away program. We are voting for the cheapest way that we can prevent the occurrence of something that would be of a most terrible significance to the United States of America, our security, our power and our ability to get certain things we need from the riches of the Indonesian territory and from Southeast Asia (quoted in Southwood and Flanagan 1983, p. 19).

In a 1965 speech in Asia, Richard Nixon argued in favor of bombing North Vietnam to protect Indonesia's "immense mineral potential." Shortly before the 1965 coup, Nixon told an Australian audience that the West "cannot allow Indonesia to go Communist anymore than Vietnam" (quoted in Scott 1975, p. 241). Indonesia, what Nixon called "by far the greatest prize in the Southeast Asia area" (Nixon 1967, p. 111), was seen by the U.S. foreign policy establishment as something to be "protected" and coveted in and of itself but also as a guarantor of Southeast Asian stability.

<sup>12</sup>See examples quoted in Caldwell 1975, pp. 15-17.

<sup>13</sup>Many U.S. elites at the time saw U.S. intervention in Vietnam as crucial for the maintenance of other parts of Southeast Asia in the U.S. (and West's) sphere of influence. In justifying U.S. involvement in Vietnam, United States Ambassador to Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, explained the geopolitical and political economic importance the region to the United States.

Geographically, Vietnam stands at the hub of a vast area of the world -- Southeast Asia -- an area with a population of 240 million people extending 2,300 miles from north to south, and 3,000 miles from east to west. The Mekong River, one of the ten largest rivers in the world, reaches the sea in South Vietnam. He who holds or has influence in Vietnam can affect the future of the Philippines and Taiwan to the east, Taiwan and Burma with their huge rice surpluses to the west, and Malaysia and Indonesia with their rubber, oil and tin to the south. Japan, Australia and New Zealand would in turn be deeply concerned with the Communization of South Vietnam (Lodge 1965, p. 15).

<sup>14</sup>"The U.S. Government played a significant role [in the 1965 slaughter in Indonesia] by supplying the names of thousands of Communist Party leaders to the Indonesian army, which hunted down the leftists and killed them, former U.S. diplomats say. . . . As many as 5,000 names were furnished to the Indonesian army, and the Americans later checked off the names of those who had been killed or captured, according to



U.S. officials . . . The lists were a detailed who's-who of the leadership of the party of 3 million members, [foreign service officer Robert] Martens said. They included names of provincial, city, and other PKI [Indonesian Communist Party] committee members, and leaders of the 'mass organizations,' such as the PKI national labor federation, women's and youth groups" (Kadane quoted in Chomsky 1990, p. 15).

<sup>15</sup>Given the geopolitical importance of Indonesia, U.S. military elites were delighted with the overthrow of Sukarno. The official publication of the U.S. Navy League called Indonesia "one of Asia's most highly developed nations and endowed by chance with what is probably the most strategically authoritative geographic location on earth" (Griswold 1973, p. 25). At the same time, the publication went on to describe Indonesia's new role in the Western imperial order of Southeast Asia.

Indonesia is rising from the ashes bequeathed by its profligate founder and his communist allies. Tomorrow, Indonesia may be the paramount nation in Southeast Asia and the day after that strategic area's unaggressive, but stern, monitor.

As some diplomatic observers now see it, Indonesia is the only nation in that part of the world with the resources, the population and the determination to prevent itself and its continental neighbors from becoming Russian or Chinese satellites. Since 1965, when the Communist (PKI) Party in Indonesia was crushed and the Sukarno regime overthrown, Jakarta, too, has seen its future "logically" directed toward that watchdog role (Ibid., p. 20).

<sup>16</sup>Mark Selden argues that throughout the twentieth century oil has been the driving force behind U.S. investment in Asia and, specifically, in Indonesia. As early as 1929, the book value of U.S. oil investment in the Dutch East Indies was in the range of US\$35-40 million; at that time oil was the largest sector of U.S. investment in Asia. Through the 1970's, oil continued to be king, "providing a powerful economic argument for the pursuit of victory in Indochina and a major lever for U.S. control of Japan" (Selden 1975, pp. 20-21).

<sup>17</sup>As Business International announced in December 1972, "Asia/Pacific leads in profit potential. . . . Data on the earnings ratios of U.S. firms with direct investments in the Far East . . . show an average annual return of 12.9 percent for 1965-69, compared to a worldwide average annual return of 10.7 percent...The Far East return [in manufacturing] is 16.3 percent, compared to 9.18 percent for the world as a whole. . . . The figures for 1969 show that the U.S. investments in the Far East return 17.2 percent (and in Japan 22.2 percent), compared to 12 percent in Europe and 8.6 percent in Canada" (quoted in Selden 1975, p. 23)

In terms of foreign investment in Indonesia, the top six "core" countries (nationally-based capitals) are (in declining order) Japan,



Hongkong, Taiwan, the U.S., South Korea and Great Britain (Associated Press, "British to Increase Investment in Indonesia", 5 June 1993, dateline: Jakarta).

<sup>18</sup>The report of the hearings before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Appropriations on foreign assistance and related agencies appropriations for 1976 clearly spelled out the need for the United States to maintain and cultivate good relations with Indonesia. In a section entitled INDONESIA'S IMPORTANCE TO U.S. FOREIGN POLICY, the report reads as follows:

Indonesia is important to U.S. interests because:

- It has the largest population of any country in Southeast Asia.
- It is the principal supplier of raw materials from the region.

\*\*Japan's continued economic prosperity depends heavily on oil and other raw materials supplied by Indonesia.

\*\*Existing American investments in Indonesia are substantial, and our trading relationship is growing rapidly.

\*\*Indonesia will probably become an increasingly important supplier of U.S. energy needs.

\*\*Indonesia is a member of OPEC, but it assumed a moderate stance in its deliberations, and did not participate in the oil embargo.

- The Indonesian archipelago sits astride strategic waterways, and the Government of Indonesia is playing a significant role in the law-of-the-sea negotiations which are vital to our security and commercial interests.

For these reasons, the United States desires that Indonesia continue its stabilising role in international affairs.

- Recollection of the Sukarno era points to the exceedingly disruptive consequences which political instability in that country can bring to Southeast Asia (U.S. Congress 1975, p. 528).

<sup>19</sup>C. Philip Liechty, a former CIA operations officer who served in Jakarta during the 1975 Indonesian invasion of East Timor, wrote:

The role by my own government was entirely in keeping with our Asian policy of the era in Vietnam, South Korea of the 1960s, Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines, and elsewhere. Among some key Americans, the predominant view seemed to be that U.S. cultivation of a newly independent East Timor, to ensure its favorable U.N. vote during those Cold War years, would not be worth the necessary



input; better to allow this tiny half of an island to be grabbed by the Jakarta generals, who already ran the other half, thereby hopefully placing them in our political debt. And so it was (Liechty 1992).

<sup>20</sup>At a July 1977 hearing before a Congressional subcommittee, a representative of the Carter's U.S. State Department spelled out the U.S. Government's stance on the issue.

The US Government did not question the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia at the time. This did not represent a legal judgement or endorsement of what took place. It was, simply, the judgement of those responsible for our policy in the area that the integration was an accomplished fact, that the realities of the situation would not be changed by our opposition to what had occurred, and that such a policy would not serve our best interests in the light of the importance of our relationship with Indonesia (quoted in BCIET 1981, p. 17).

Such an analysis of the situation was contradicted by the very same U.S. State Department. As of March 1977, the State Department estimated that two-thirds of the East Timorese population were in FRETILIN-controlled areas (Chomsky 1980, p. 162). In light of this admission, integration was certainly not an "accomplished fact." At the very least, if the desire for East Timorese self-determination existed on the part of the U.S. Government, economic and military assistance could have been cut. However, aid was actually increased at this time.

Carter's Assistant Secretary of State Holbrooke, speaking to a Senate subcommittee in June 1980, summed up the administration's position.

The situation in East Timor is one of the number of very important concerns of the United States in Indonesia. Indonesia, with a population of 150 million people, is the fifth largest nation in the world. It has the largest Muslim population in the world, is a moderate member of the Non-Aligned Movement, is an important oil producer -- which plays a moderate role within OPEC -- and occupies a strategic position astride the sea lanes between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. President Suharto and other prominent Indonesian leaders have publicly called for the release of our hostages in Iran. Indonesia's position within the Association of South East Asian Nations -- ASEAN -- is also important and it has played a central role in supporting Thailand and maintaining the security of Thailand in the face of Vietnam's destabilizing actions in Indo-China. Finally, Indonesia has provided humane treatment for over 50,000 Indo-Chinese refugees and taken the initiative in offering an island site as an ASEAN refugee processing centre [sic]. Indonesia is, of course, important to key US allies in the region, especially Japan and Australia. We highly value our cooperative relationship with Indonesia\* (quoted in Dunn 1983, pp. 353-354)



Regarding the US Government's position on East Timor, the legal advisor in Carter's State Department had this to say:

I think it is important to state that I do not view US policy in the case of East Timor as setting a legal precedent for future cases. The fact is that decisions whether or not to treat an entity as part of another entity are most often taken as political decisions on the basis of all the circumstances of the particular case in what is perceived as the national interest. An important factor to be considered, obviously, is our commitment . . . to promote respect for human rights, including the right of self-determination.

However, the question remains what we are required to do if this right is not observed as we might wish in a situation in which we might believe that efforts by us to change the situation would be futile and injurious to other national interests of the United States. We do not believe that we are required in such circumstances to refrain from acting on the basis of the prevailing factual situation (from U.S. Department of State, American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980, Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1983, pp. 1016-1018 as it appeared in Shalom October 1988, pp. 14).

In other words, for the Carter Administration, Indonesia's importance to U.S. geopolitical and political-economic interests requires the abandonment of East Timor.

\*Taken from Foreign Assistance and Related Programs: Appropriations for 1981, Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, 96th Congress, June 1980.

<sup>21</sup>Based on a phone conversation with Wayne Forrest in September 1992.



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